Classic Poetry Series

Shiv Kumar Batalvi
- poems -

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Shiv Kumar Batalvi(23 July 1936 - 7 May 1973)

Shiv Kumar 'Batalvi' (Punjabi: ???? ????? ??????) was a noted Punjabi language poet, who was most known for his romantic poetry, noted for its heightened passion, pathos, separation and lover's agony.

He became the youngest recipient of the Sahitya Akademi Award in 1967, given by Sahitya Akademi (India's National Academy of Letters), for his epic verse play based on the ancient legend of Puran Bhagat, Loona (1965), now considered a masterpiece in modern Punjabi literature, and which also created a new genre, of modern Punjabi kissa. Today, his poetry stands in equal footing, amongst that by stalwarts of modern Punjabi poetry, like Mohan Singh and Amrita Pritam, all of whom are popular on both sides of India-Pakistan border.

 Biography

Shiv Kumar was born in a Saraswat Brahmin family on 23 July 1936 (though a few documents related to him state October 7th, 1937 as his DOB), in village Bara Pind Lohtian, Shakargarh Tehsil, Sialkot District (now in Punjab province, Pakistan), to Pandit Krishan Gopal, village tehsildar in the revenue department, and Shanti Devi, a housewife.

In 1947, when he was just 11, his family moved to Batala Gurdaspur district after partition of India, where his father continued his work as a patwari and young Shiv received his primary education. Allegedly, he was a dreamy child, often vanishing for the duration of the day, to be found lying under trees by the riverbank close to the Mandir or Hindu temple outside the village, lost in a brown reverie. He appears to have been fascinated by local renditions of the Hindu Epic Ramayana, as well as wandering Minstrel singers, Snake Charmers & the like - which feature as metaphors in his poetry, giving it a uniquely rural flavor.

 Education

He completed his matriculation in 1953, from Punjab University, and enrolled in the . program at Baring Union Christian College, Batala, though before completing his degree he moved to S.N. College, Qadian, where he joined the Arts program more suited to his persona, though he left that too in the second year. Thereafter he joined a school at Baijnath, Himachal Pradesh to do a diploma in Civil Engineering, here again he left it in the middle. Next he studied for some time at Govt. Ripudaman College, Nabha.

 Struggles With Conventional Matrimony

He fell in love with the daughter of the noted Punjabi writer Gurbaksh Singh Preetlari who was married off to a UK citizen because of caste differences between the two. It was during this time that he turned increasingly to alcohol for solace, allegedly writing the poem :"Ajj Din Chhadeya Tere Rang Varga" ["Today dawned colored like your complexion..."] while standing outside a "Theka Sharab Desi" [Liquor Vend], waiting for it to open so he could buy his booze. He remained unlucky in love, and bereavement for love loss reflected intensely in his poetry.In early 1967, he got married, to a Brahmin girl, Aruna, of his parents & family's choosing. According to friends, he only agreed because she had a striking resemblance to his youthful love.

 Youngest Recipient of Sahitya Akademi Award

Later in life, his father got a job as patwari at Qadian, it was during this period, that he produced some of his best work. His first anthology of poems was published in 1960, titled Piran da Paraga (The Scarf of Sorrows), which became an instant success. In 1965, he became the youngest recipient of the Sahitya Akademi Award in 1967, for his magnum opus, a verse play Loona (1965). His poetry recitations, and singing his own verse, made him and his work even more popular amongst the masses.

Soon after his marriage, in 1968, he shifted to Chandigarh, where he joined the State Bank of India, as a PRO. In the following years, bad health plagued him, though he continued to write prolifically.

 Personal Life

On 5 February 1967 he married, Aruna, a Brahmin girl, from Kirri Mangyal, Gurdaspur district, and later the couple had two children, Meharban (1968) and Puja (1969).

 Struggles With Conventional Life-Span

His writings have always been open about his pronounced death wish, and he died at his father-in-law's residence, at Kirri Mangyal Pathankot, due to liver cirrhosis, a result of chronic alcoholism, at a young age of 35 years.

 Legacy

One of his anthology, Alvida (Farewell) was published posthumously in 1974, by

the Guru Nanak Dev University, Amritsar. 'Shiv Kumar Batalvi Award' for Best Writer, is given each year.

 In Media

Many of his poems were sung by Deedar Singh Pardesi. Jagjit Singh-Chitra Singh, and Surinder Kaur, have also sung many of his poems. Nusrat Fateh Ali Khan's rendition of one of his poem "Maye ni Maye" is known for its soulfulness and imagery. In a recent album, Rabbi (2004), by Rabbi Shergill features, his poem, "Ishtihar". Punjabi folk singer, Hans Raj Hans also did a popular album, ‘Gham’, on the poetry of Shiv Kumar. In 2005, a compilation album was released, titled, Ek Kudi Jida Naa Mohabbat... 'Shiv Kumar Batalvi, with numbers sung by Mahendra Kapoor, Jagjit Singh and Asa Singh Mastana.

In 2004, Punjabi play titled Dardaan Da Darya based on the life of Shiv Kumar was performed at 'Punjab Kala Bhavan', Chandigarh.

A Borrowed Song

Give me, O Lord
A few more songs.
My fire is dying,
Give me a spark.
At a very young age
I exhausted every sorrow.
For my youth
Give me a fresh pain.

Give me a song, like youth itself,
Beautiful, magical.
Like the redness of a rising day
That sparkles in a brimming lake.
Like the first star of the evening
That shines in a treeless desert.

Night is approaching my desert,
Give me a star or two,
Or let me sink, like the evening redness,
Into the brimming lake.

Lord, life is unbearable without a companion,
Unbearable without a song.
We all know that life has to be lived,
That pain has been sewn into it.
Do the deer drink the water
At every shore?
Let the water at my shore
Be washed away, undrunk.
Or take back the songs
That you let me write.

Lord, we should never extol beauty
Which is empty of fire,
Nor praise those eyes
Whose tears lack salt.
We should not sing a song bereft of pain,
Or write a word devoid of fragrance.
If my words are without fragrance

Tear them from the branch,
Or give me another song,
Like youth itself.

At a very young age
I exhausted every sorrow.
For my youth
Give me a fresh pain.

Shiv Kumar Batalvi

A Walk On A Moonlit Night

If I walk on a moonlit night,
My shadow walks beside me,
O my life.

Moonlight hides in every lane,
Which lane should I take?
O my life.

The night-scents are vigilant,
And the wind is soothing,
O my life.

I am ignorant about these rays of moonlight,
Will I awaken one?
O my life.

If I awaken a ray of moonlight,
I will be branded a sinner,
O my life.

So I walk in fear,
Treading lightly,
O my life.

Separation was put in our swaddling cloth,
By our mothers,
O my life.

Since the beginning, light has been our enemy,
How can I let it touch my limbs?
O my life.

If I come to you on a moonlit night,
My shadow walks beside me,
O my life.

Moonlight hides in every lane
Which lane should I take?
O my life.

Shiv Kumar Batalvi

Butterflies

I catch butterflies,
I catch butterflies.

From the beautiful
Flower-scented garden
Of life, I catch
Golden-colored, blue,
Shimmering and yellow ones!
I think that if catch them all,
From the entire forest.
I will jab their butterfly wings
To their shoulder.

But whenever I try to catch them,
My heart begins to tremble
Like a branch of henna
That shivers in the breeze.
And the butterfly takes flight.

Flowers of sin, like some black sun ,
Bloom in my dreams
Their perfume-sodden fragrance
Spreading through each heartbeat.

A delicate, queenly butterfly
Comes fluttering by,
Delighted to see the flowers of sin,
She alights, intoxicated.
I, unaware, pluck all the flowers
And put them into my cloth bag.

But when I start to leave
The cloth tears,
And the butterfly takes flight.

How foolish I was to think
That I could catch a butterfly!

The cold winter of grief

Scorched my flowers of happiness.
The green vine of hope
Shed its healthy leaves.

Seeing this darkness,
They slipped back to the valley, they returned,
The red birds that had flown far to seek
Their desires.

It is the evening of life
Lotus-hearts lie asleep.
The dew drops of my life
Have spilled, some sipped
Deliciously, by the butterflies.

As the night goes by,
I think that day will surely dawn,
That once again the sun will not err,
Regarding darkness.

A milky lotus of the evening
Will bloom upon this earth again.
I hope that once again,
In that perfumed garden
I will be able to catch butterflies.

Shiv Kumar Batalvi

High Mountains

The sun peeks out
From behind the high mountains,
Planting little seedling of light.
It crushes the yellow sunshine
Into small pieces,
Making anklets for the mountain tops!

Ankle deep in the wind
Flow perfumes,
The birds fall asleep.
Through a clump of green trees
A water channel flows
Piping a melody!

Seeing the blue lotus
In the mirror- like water
The drooping leaves weep.
The wind has tied
Tiny anklets around its feet,
And stamps her heels as she walks!

Raindrops asleep
On soft, tender shoots,
Are lit by sunbeams.
A tiny, golden bird
Calls to the travelers
With shrill whistles.

In the clear blue sky,
A kite circles,
Among the rays of light.
A flower becomes a drinking station,
As it offers droplets of sweet dew
To the bees.

A butterfly is at the door -
The maulsari spreads its fragrance generously,
Like alms to a mendicant!
In such a season,

In the name of your daughters,
Cover my pain
With a layer of sighs.

An old, tired ache
Plays guessing games,
On the paths of my sight.
A sweet, moody separation
Breaks over me,
And eats into my bones.

Unearth a way that I can
Meet my beloved,
And relieve my longing for a glimpse of her.
Bereft of our beloved,
We infatuated ones,
Are called insane.

There is no one here mother,
Whom I can call my own,
Who will share my pain.
At such a time, without my beloved,
I cannot spend a moment
In your town.

The sun peeks out
From behind the high mountains,
Planting little seedling of light.
Crushes the yellow sunshine
Into small pieces
To make anklets for the mountain tops!

Shiv Kumar Batalvi

Ishtehaar

A girl whose name is Love
Is lost.
Simple, beautiful,
She is lost.

Her beauty, ethereal
Virtuous, like Mary,
Her laughter, blossoms falling,
Her gait, a poem.
Tall as a cypress,
Barely alight,
Yet she undertands the language of a glance.
It has been ages since she was lost
Yet it feels like yesterday,
It feels like today.
It feels like now.

She was standing beside me just now,
She is beside me no more.
What deception is this? What trickery?
I am bewildered.
My eyes examine every passerby,
Scanning their faces,
Searching for that girl.

When evening descends upon the bazaar
And perfumes erupt at every corner,
When restlessness and tiredness
Collide with leisure,
Isolated in that noise,
Her absence eats at me.
I see her
Every moment I feel as though -
Every day I feel as though -
From this throng of people,
From this crowd of odors,
She will call out to me,
I will recognize her,
She will recognize me.

But from this flood of noise
Nobody calls out to me,
Nobody looks toward me.

But, I don't know why I feel
Indistinctly, obscurely,
Every day, through every crowd,
As though her form moves past me
But I am not able to see her.
I am lost in her face
And stay lost in it
I keep dissolving in this grief.
I keep melting in this grief.

I beg this girl, for my sake,
I beg her for her own sake,
I beg her for everyones sake
I beg her for the sake of this world,
I beg her for the sake of God,
If somewhere she reads or hears this
Whether she be alive or dying
That she come and meet me once
That she not stain my love.
Else I will not be able to live,
I will not be able to write a song.

A girl whose name is Love
Is lost.
Simple, beautiful,
She is lost.

Shiv Kumar Batalvi

Jindu De Baageen

In the garden of life,
Grows a sapling of pain,
The deer of songs nibbles at it.
The winds of seperation
Blow through the night,
A few leaves drop.

A few leaves drop,
Mother, they drop,
And sounds stir in the garden.
If a few birds of breath
Should fly away,
The deer of songs is afraid.

But the birds of breath
Will surely fly,
Nothing can hold them back.
Through the night
In every direction
They fly away.

Don't be afraid, deer of songs,
The leaves of pain
Do not always stay fresh.
Though the saplings of pain
So filled with perfume
Sprout easily.

Don't forget that you possess
The sac of musk,
That you have a lot of pain,
That your face
Is beautiful
And your words precious.

So keep on leaping
And keep on jumping
What you are doing is right.
Around your neck

Lie garlands of sorrow,
May more of them rain upon you!

In the garden of life
Grows a sapling of pain,
The deer of songs nibbles at it.
The winds of seperation
Blow through the night,
A few leaves drop.

Shiv Kumar Batalvi

Leaflet

A girl whose name is love, is missing, is missing
Simple wisher, beautiful looking, is missing, is missing

Her looks are like that of fairies
Her nature is like that of Mariam
When she laughs, the flowers fall
When she walks, she looks like a gazal
She is tall like the sarroo tree
But her age is hardly like that of fire
But she can understand the talks of eyes
She is missing since ages
But it appears as yesterday's talk
It appears as today's talk
It appears as now's talk

Just now, she was standing with me
Just now, she is not with me
What is this deception, what is this stranding
My thinking is very much surprised
My eyes are searching the colour of
Face of everybody coming or going
And are searching that girl

At the dawn of evening when in market
On the turns, fragrance starts appearing
When idleness, lethargy and uneasiness
Starts accumulating on the four-way crossings
In this Noisy loneliness
The absence of that girl eats me up
The absence of that girl becomes apparent
Every moment it appears to me
Every day it appears to me
In the celebrations and in the crowds
In the accumulated fragrances
She will call me
I will recognize her
She will recognize me
But in this flood of noise
Nobody calls me

Nobody looks towards me

But I don't know why I get the feeling
But I don't know why I appear to see
Every day in every crowd
Her statue appears to be going
But only I am not able to see her
I remain lost in the face of
That lost girl
I keep on deteriorating in her sorrow
I keep on depleting in her sorrow

I bind that girl with my oath
I bind that girl with her oath
I bind that girl with everybody's oath
I bind that girl with world's oath
I bind that girl with God's oath
If she is somewhere reading or hearing
If she's living or dying
Once she should come and meet me
She should not put a blot on my sincerity
Otherwise I can not live
I can not write any song

A girl whose name is love, is missing, is missing
Simple wisher, beautiful looking, is missing, is missing.

Shiv Kumar Batalvi

Listen Mother

Listen, mother,
My songs are eyes
Stinging with grains of separation.
In the middle of the night ,
They wake and weep for dead friends.
Mother, I cannot sleep.

Upon them I lay strips of moonlight
Soaked in perfume,
But the pain does not recede.
I foment them
With warm sighs
Yet they turn on me ferociously.

I am still young,
And need guidance myself.
Who can advise him?
Mother, would you tell him,
To clench his lips when he weeps,
Or the world will hear him cry.

Tell him, mother, to swallow the bread
Of separation.
He is fated to mourn.
Tell him to lick the salty dew
On the roses of sorrow,
And stay strong.

Where are the snake handlers
From whom I can beg for a shroud to cover me?
Somebody give me a shroud that will fit!
How can I wait like a jogi
At the doorstep of these people
Greedy for gold?

Listen, o my pain,
Love is like a butterfly
Pinned forever to a stake.
It is like a bee,

From whom desire,
Stays miles away.

Love is a palace
Where, but for birds,
Nothing else lives.
Love is a hearth
Where the bed of fulfillment,
Is never laid.

Mother, tell him not to
Call out the name of his dead friends
So loudly in the middle of the night.
When I am gone, I fear
That this malicious world,
Will say that my songs were evil.

Listen, o mother
My songs are eyes
Stinging with grains of separation.
In the middle of the night ,
They wake and weep for dead friends.
Mother, I cannot sleep.

Shiv Kumar Batalvi

Maen Kal Naheen Rahina

Listen, O my life,
I will not be here tomorrow.
Tonight, let us clutch a song tightly,
And claim its kiss.
Listen, O my life
I will not be here tomorrow.

The moonlight will not flower tomorrow,
Nor will bloom the champak.
Perfumes will not roam the garden
With uncovered head.
Nor like today
Will yielding branches
Bend to touch the earth,
Listen, O my life
I will not be here tomorrow.

The cranes will have scattered,
Flown far away.
By tomorrow, time, like a husband,
Will have carried off my pain.
No longer will flowers lie like jewels
Around the throat
Of the season tomorrow.
Listen, O my life
I will not be here tomorrow.

By daybreak the footprints on paths
Will not be traceable.
No longer will my songs sew a robe
True to separation.
Never will tears collect like this again,
Beneath the shadows of the past.
Listen, O my life
I will not be here tomorrow.

Not, like today, will we sit together again
You and I.
Not, like this, will will the sun rise tomorrow,

Nor, like this, will it set.
The bird of time
Will have collected
Every single grain of my breath.
Listen, O my life.
I will not be here tomorrow.
Tonight let us clutch a song tightly
And claim its kiss.

Shiv Kumar Batalvi

Menu Vida Karo

Bid me goodbye
Lord,
Bid me goodbye.
Gift me a warm tear,
Lay separation upon my palm,
And bid me goodbye.

Circle pain around my head,
With the sacred water of tears.
Then distribute this water
To every single lover in the world.
And Lord, if a dropp remains,
Gulp it yourself
And bid me goodbye.

Lord, at this time of farewell,
Let us declare the truth.
It is only if we give away pearls
That we receive separation.
Lord, now that this clay is bereft of separation
Set it free,
And bid me goodbye.

My mother died in my milk-years,
My father during childhood.
My beloved died in the season of youth,
And these cursed songs were born.
Now, O Lord, I entreat you,
Do not clutch my arm so tightly.
Bid me goodbye.
Gift me a warm tear,
Lay separation upon my palm,
And bid me goodbye

Shiv Kumar Batalvi

My Friend

My friend, it is my own sorrow
That has destroyed me.
It is a lie to think
That your love had the strength to do it.
I have no complaint against
Heat or drought.
My garden was destroyed
By the dews of spring.

It is not the fault
Of the black night.
The ocean was defeated
By its beloved moon.

Who is it that
Blames death?
A man is destroyed,
By his birth.

The sun that rises
Is certain to sink.
He lies who says
The west destroyed it.

Yes, one can be destroyed
By grieving for dead friends,
Though it is more likely the result,
Of the display of that grief.

The enemy is not the murderer,
I tell you.
Shiv was killed
By those who loved him.

Shiv Kumar Batalvi

My Song

Do not sing
My song.
I must sing this song
Myself,
And then die.

This song is more soiled than the earth,
As old as the sun,
For many births I have had to live
The weight of its words.
No one else has the ability
To bring voice to it.
This song was born with me,
And will die with me.
I must sing this song
Myself,
And then die.

This song has a rare melody,
It is filled with pain.
It is like the shriek of cranes
Heard from distant mountains in autumn.
Or the clamor of birds in a forest,
Heard in a chaste dawn.
Or the sound of the wind flowing through high grasses
Heard on a black night.
I must sing this song
Myself,
And then die.

When I and my songs
Both die,
They who inhabit separation-houses
Will seek out my grave.
With one voice,
They will declare,
'Only a very few are fated
To shoulder such pain.'

Do not sing
This song of mine.
I must sing this song
Myself,
And then die.

Shiv Kumar Batalvi

Noble Father

When the cotton flowers bloom,
O noble father,
Bring that season back for me,
O noble father.

That was the season when I lost my song,
Around its neck was the string of separation.
On its face were boils of sorrow,
Its eyes looked like the water of ruined wells.
It had been a song, that when sung,
Released the scent of musk.
O noble father,
Bring back that song for me.
O noble father.

One day my song and I,
In that enchanted season,
Ploughed the earth of my heart,
Sowed it with seeds of undefiled dreams.
But no matter how many tears I poured,
No flower bloomed.
O noble father.
Bring back one flower for me,
O noble father.

What use your fertile lands
If daughters wilt?
What use your great lakes
If the swans are thirsting?
What use your ample wealth,
Your granary of pearls,
O noble father,
If you cannot bring back the season,
When the cotton flower blooms,
O noble father.

Shiv Kumar Batalvi

O Woe

O woe! The sky is thin, listless.
O woe! The stars are withered, extinguished.
O woe! The winds are still, dead.
O woe! The world is inhabited by graves.
O woe! Today, words have turned to stone.
O woe! Again and again, my heart swells, bursts, melts.
O woe! Do not ever become like me.
O woe! The waters of love are poisonous,
O woe! The road is long and harsh,
O woe! And ankle deep in thorns.
O woe! Here, you are robbed of everything .
O woe! Even death is not for you.
O woe! Today, the songs of love are bitter.
O woe! But sweet is this poison, sweet.

Shiv Kumar Batalvi

Pepper Leaves

How can a moonless night
Offer anything to the full moon?
Why would a camel leave the desert,
For the ocean?

Tell me, how can the henna of good fortune
Color a hand,
If fate crushes pepper leaves
Upon ones palm?

Grief, like a cataract
Descended right into my eyes.
It is a terrible journey thru the valley of love
How can I live my life like this?

Who takes care
Of acacia flowers?
Does the gardener prune
A jujube bush?

My songs have turned bitter
From eating berries of pain.
Who can sing tender songs
With a life that feels like death.

How could I cry out
When I saw the blade move across love's neck?
The butcher had thrust
His silver knife into my throat.

The yearning to be with you
Was my destruction.
Such were the arrows of separation,
Shot by the tyranical rulers of love.

I gathered pebbles from your street
And chewed them like boiled grain.
I collected bits of straw
And held them close.

Not one dropp could I drink,
Of the pure water of love.
It became infested with worms
The moment it touched my lips.

Shiv Kumar Batalvi

Pinch Of Separation

My songs are like eyes
That sting with the grains of separation.
In the middle of the night ,
They wake and weep for dead friends.
Mother, I cannot sleep.

Soaked in perfume,
But the pain does not recede.
I foment them
With warm sighs,
Yet they turn on me ferociously.

And need guidance myself.
Who can advise him?
Mother, would you tell him,
To clench his lips when he weeps,
Or the world will hear him cry.

Tell him, mother, to swallow the bread
Of separation.
He is fated to mourn.
Tell him to lick the salty dew
On the roses of sorrow,
And stay strong.

Who are the snake handlers
From whom I can get another skin?
Give me a cover for myself.
How can I wait like a jogi
At the doorstep of these people
Greedy for gold?

Listen, o my pain,
Love is that butterfly
Which is pinned forever to a stake.
Love is that bee,
From whom desire,
Stays miles away.

Love is that palace
Where nothing lives
Except for the birds.
Love is that hearth
Where the colored bed of fulfillment,
Is never laid.

Mother, tell him not to
Call out the name of his dead friends
So loudly in the middle of the night.
When I am gone, I fear
That this malicious world,
Will say that my songs were evil.

Mother, o mother
My songs are like eyes
That sting with the grains of separation.
In the middle of the night ,
They wake and weep for dead friends.
Mother, I cannot sleep.

Shiv Kumar Batalvi

Say Something

Say a word, say something
O my dark beloved!
Stir spring into my life!
O my dark beloved!

If you stir spring into my life,
I will become a doe.
In the dense garden of your beauty
I will forage for fragrance.
If you shoot arrows of separation at me
I, infatuated, will swoon!
I will not drink, though you pour upon me
Delicate, sweet words.

If you stir spring into my life,
I will become moonlight.
At midnight, in a sandalwood forest
I will come to you.
Heavy with perfume
I will lay a bed for you.
While you sleep, I will kiss you,
And fall back, unbalanced.

If you stir spring into my life,
I will become a cloud.
Whatever road you walk
Upon it I will shower myself.
The wells of grief, I know, are deeper than life itself,
I will fill them, neck high.
These wells that have no rope,
And no pail.

If you stir spring into my life,
I will become a butterfly.
The pollen of separation, more precious than wisdom
I will distribute from door to door.
The tree of separation is tinier than a nail
But casts a shadow a million miles wide,
This tree that grows peversely,

Right beside the heart.
O my dark beloved!
Stir spring into my life!
O my dark beloved!

Shiv Kumar Batalvi

Separation

People worship god.
I worship this separation from you.
It is worth Haj to a hundred Meccas,
This separation from you.

People say I am as brilliant as the sun,
They say I am famous.
What a fire it has lit in me,
This separation from you.

Behind me is my shadow,
Ahead, is my darkness.
I fear that it might leave me,
This separation from you.

No taint of the body is in it,
Nor litter of the mind,
All has been winnowed out,
By this separation from you.

When sorrow comes, bringing with it
Loneliness and pain,
I pull it close to me,
This separation from you.

Sometimes it colors my words
Sometimes it weaves through my songs,
It has taught me great deal,
This separation from you.

When sorrow, defeated, fell at my feet,
Amazed at my fidelity,
The world came out to see
This separation from you.

Love earned me fame.
People flocked to praise me.
It wept in my embrace,
This separation from you.

The world turned out to tell me,
That I had been unwise.
It sat me on a throne today
This separation from you.

[Translated from 'BirhaRa' by Suman Kashyap]

Shiv Kumar Batalvi

Separation,You Are King

Let us speak of separation,
Separation is king.
A body that does not feel separation,
Is dead body.

We are all born in the house of separation,
We are children of separation,
We receive it, we swallow it,
We are on this earth to bear it.

In the temple of separation each one of us
Burns like incense,
Without separation every odor of life
Would perish.

From separation emerges
This earth, this sky.
From separation originates the sun
And the days revolve.

I was supremely fortunate that this separation from you,
Attached itself to me.
Without it I would have been just a piece of clay
In an empty graveyard.

Today all the world is mine
And all the skies.
Today every color sways
In my courtyard.

Why, my soul, like a woman,
Do you long for union?
Do different directions
Ever meet?

I must extract the very essence of fragrance,
For I have been given the gift of separation,
For the sake of this separation
I would give up a hundred births.

Let us speak of separation,
Separation is king.
A body that does not feel separation,
Is dead body.

[Translated from 'Birha Tu Sultan' by Suman Kashyap]

Shiv Kumar Batalvi

Sures De Marcia

Shiv Kumar Batalvi

The Accusation

My friend ,
You have accused me
Of stealing the color from a butterfly
Of your town.
I tore out of some garden, you say,
A sapling of gulmohar
And planted it
In a desolate and barren cemetery.
Just as the coral tree
Has bitter roots,
So, in my heart,
Lies sin!
I am degenerate, immoral,
You have judged me to be vile!
I am well aquainted with pain and have deliberately
Made it my power.
I am a bird of prey and do not care
For the friendship of little birds.
My colors are false,
I am a dishonest dyer!
The inky serpent of fame
Lies around my neck
And strikes, with my songs,
Little heart-baskets!

My pain, like Ashwathaama's
Is never-ending!
You remind me that my body-room
Will disintegrate soon enough.
In exchange for fragrant songs
I trade in wombs.
I am, you write
A very adolescent trader.

You say that a shadow
Is a child of light.
It is not the duty of a shadow
To separate.
The duty of a shadow is

Devotion to light.
In light, to always be ahead,
And to extinguish itself in light.

Even a bird can fly away
If is miserable in its cage.
But each day
I catch and discard new birds.
The reason I do this, you say, is that I covet just one thing,
The sorrow in my soul.
Because every song I sing,
Is a song of sorrow.

You also write
About one butterfly.
The butterfly who spent a short time
In my garden,
The butterfly with a weakness for,
Silver flowers,
The butterflywho desired,
Golden stars.

Her face was sweet,
Like the moon in a desert.
My songs
Were very dear to her.
You considered me
A son of Saraswati,
Today your opinion about me
Is altered!

At the end you have written
That I ought to be ashamed of myself!
That I should drown myself
In a tub of acid!
I should take my sick self -
Along with my songs -
And leave the environs
Of your town today!
Society has no need
Of my worthless sorrows!
I should be fighting for

The rights of workers!
I ought to disperse the color
Of my beloved
To the grain in the fields.
I ought to take the sorrow of the world,
And set it, like a jewel, in a ring of songs!

Shiv Kumar Batalvi

The Hawk

Mother! Mother!
I befriended a hawk.
A plume on his head
Bells on his feet,
He came pecking for grain.
I was enamored!

His beauty
Was sharp as sunlight.
He was thirsty for perfumes.
His color was the color of a rose,
The son of a fair mother.
I was enamored!

His eyes,
Were an evening in springtime.
His hair, a dark cloud.
His lips,
A rising autumn dawn.
I was enamored!

His breath
Was filled with flowers,
Like a sandalwood garden.
Spring danced thru his body
So bathed was it in fragrances.
I was enamored!.

In his words
Blew the eastern breeze,
Like the sound of a blackbird.
His smile was the whiteness of a crane in the rice fields,
Taking flight at the clap of a hand.
I was enamored!.

I laid
A bed of love
In the moonlight.
My body-sheet was stained

The instant he laid his foot on my bed.
I was enamored!

The corners of my eyes,
Hurt.
A flood of tears engulfed me.
All night long I tried to fathom
How he did this to me.
I was enamored!

Early in the morning
I scrubbed and bathed my body
With vaTana.
But embers kept bursting out,
And my hands flagged.
I was enamored!

I crushed choori,
He would not eat it.
So I fed him the flesh of my heart.
He took flight, such a flight did he take,
That he never returned.
I was enamored!

Mother! Mother!
I befriended a hawk.
A plume on his head
Bells on his feet,
He came pecking for grain.
I was enamored!

Shiv Kumar Batalvi

The Night Of Sorrows

Either this sorrowful night is long
Or my songs are interminable.
This dreadful night does not end,
Nor do my songs cease.

How deep are these lakes?
No one has measured them.
But they do not swell up in the rains,
Nor dry up in drought.

There is something wrong with my bones,
Set them on fire and they do not scorch.
Sighs burn them,
Grief scorches them.

These are the injuries of love.
What cure, my friend, is possible?
A touch hurts.
A salve hurts.

The fair night belongs to the moon,
To whom does a dark night belong?
A moon does not hide among stars,
Nor can stars be concealed in the moon.

Shiv Kumar Batalvi

The Old House

It has been a while
Since my self became displeased with me
And left.
What remains with me
Is just an empty shell
And every wall of my home,
Is overcast with sadness.
It has been a while
Since my self became displeased with me
And left.
And my home, since his departure
Is grieving.

He often returned home
Very late into the night.
As soon as the sun rose,
He would become fearful of the crevices in the walls.
What thoughts leaped across his mind
He would never say,
But all day long
He chased his shadow.

This fruitless wandering of his
Often scared me.
The wildness in his eyes
Almost ate into the mirror
And the cobwebs in that old house
Stirred in this silence.

One day, during such a silence
I showed him the walls of the house.
The thought of those walls weeping in the sunlight
Struck him deeply.
I spoke to him about the walls without thinking,
Because I lost for evermore
His association with these walls.

Before he left the house that day
He walked through every inch of it,

He embraced every coughing,
Ailing brick in the house.
And since that ill-omened day
He never once returned home.

Now whenever someone kills himself
Across a railroad,
Or a group of monks with shaven head
Walks through the town,
Or a Naxalite
Slays somebody -
The walls of my home
Become feverish.
The ailing bricks of this old house
Shiver.
The ailing bricks of this old house
Have faith
That wherever he is, in whatever condition
He is blameless.
He is not displeased with the house,
He is just displeased with the walls of the house.

It has been a while
Since my self became displeased with me
And left.
What remains with me
Is an empty shell,
That is the companion
Of the dying walls of this old house.

[Translated from 'BuDHa Ghar' by Suman Kashyap]

Shiv Kumar Batalvi

The Pan Of Sorrows

I will give you the grain of tears,
Roast my sorrows in your pan,
O, tender of the fire.

Tender of the fire, branch of magnolia,
Roast my sorrows in your pan.

I am late already,
The shadows are fading,
The cattle have returned,
From the forest.
The birds have raised their clamor.
Roast my sorrows in your pan,
Tender of the fire.

Hurry, be quick,
I have far to go,
To the place
Where my companions have gone.
I have heard the road to that town is difficult
Roast my sorrows in your pan.
Tender of the fire.

When my turn comes,
Your bale of kindling is damp.
Why has your earthen pan
Become flaccid?
What has gone wrong with your fire?
Roast my sorrows in your pan.
Tender of the fire.

Mine is just a handful of grains,
Roast them, and let me go on my way,
Don't leave them raw,
Roast them well.
I beg you, bring an end to this wrangling,
Roast my sorrows in your pan.
Tender of the fire.

The wind has dropped,
Its mournful weeping ended.
A sweet heat
Is rising in the stars.
My breaths are like a marriage procession
Whose bridegroom is displeased.
Roast my sorrows in your pan.
O tender of the fire.

Tender of the fire, branch of magnolia,
Roast my sorrows in your pan.

Shiv Kumar Batalvi

The Poor Man

Today this poor man
Begs you once again,
For one more tragedy,
For the sake of his pen.

It has been an age
Since I have drunk of sorrow,
Stir tears into pain,
Make it twice as fierce.

This blank sheet of paper
Watches me silently,
A caravan of poems
Is lost in a desert of words.

I want to walk
With the ache of the thorn in my foot,
Whatever be the distance, my friend,
From sorrow to the grave.

Even pain has turned its back upon me.
Come back! says Shiv,
You have been my tale
For a long, long time!

[Translated from 'Aj Fer Dil Gareeb Da' by Suman Kashyap]

Shiv Kumar Batalvi

The Request

The sun that you stole
Was mine.
The house that you threw into darkness,
Was mine.

The sunshine that smiles in your home, is mine.
My life is bleak without it,
The odor of my grief is heavy on it,
It was mine yesterday and is mine today.

It is I, bereft of light, who am its father.
It is my fire that is embedded in its limbs.
The smell of my sun is in it,
The sun that was stolen from me in broad daylight.

But you cannot be blamed for this theft.
The sun has been stolen in every era.
An afternoon has always died,
Weeping for the sun.

I, lightless, beamless, have a request,
I, a faithless father, stand at your door.
Let me place a sun upon your forehead,
And beg you for my sunlight.

I, who died long ago, beg you to bestow this on me.
Never utter my name again in the sunlight.
If ever some ray asks a question, remain silent,
Or call me a 'black sun' and let it go.

This is the request of a father of sunlight.
From this day, on my sunshine is dead to me
Along with the sun it is yours now,
Wherever it smiles, is the home if its father.

The sun that you stole
Was mine.
The house that you threw into darkness,
Was mine.

[Translated from 'Arjoi' by Suman Kashyap]

Shiv Kumar Batalvi

To Be A Bird

I wish that I could be a bird
That I could fly, that I could sing,
That I could touch untouchable peaks,
That I could forget the roads of the world,
And never return.

I would bath luxuriously
Drinking long sips of water.
By the shore of a great lake,
I would sing a halting song.
I would go into a flowering wilderness
Gulp the perfume laden winds.
I would warm in a tight embrace,
The peaks of mountains,
Deadened by centuries of freezing cold.
I wish that I could be a bird.

My nest would be among the mulberry trees,
On in the caper, the mesquite or the cypress.
When the cold east wind blew
The jewelled branches would bend
As if playing, swaying
With their hair flying in the wind.
One day there would be a storm
And all the twigs would all scatter.
Nestless, homeless, I would become,
For the rest of my life I would drink the nectar of sorrow
And live my life in its intoxication.
I wish that I could be a bird.

Shiv Kumar Batalvi

Trees

Some trees look like sons to me.
Some like mothers.
Some are daughters, brides,
A few like brothers.
Some are like my grandfather,
Sparsely leafed.
Some like my grandmother
Who threw choori to the crows.
Some trees are like the friends
I used to kiss and embrace.
One is my beloved
Sweet. Painful.
There are trees I would like
To throw on my shoulder playfully,
There are trees I would like
To kiss and then die.
The trees sway together
When strong winds blow.
I wish I could render
Their verdant, leafy language.
I wish that I could
Return as a tree
And if you wanted to listen to my song
I would sing it in the trees.
The trees are like my mother,
May their shade live forever.

Shiv Kumar Batalvi

Turbaned On

Like a branch of the pomegranate tree,
We lie here, swaying slowly, o turbaned one.
Turbaned one, black of heart,
Swaying slowly, o turbaned one.

Like the eyes of a wild deer,
Burning in the forest, o turbaned one.
Turbaned one, black of heart,
Burning in the forest, o turbaned one.

Like boats left at the shore,
We lie here, sinking slowly, o turbaned one.
Turbaned one, black of heart,
Sinking slowly, o turbaned one.

Like lumps of sugar candy,
We lie here, dissolving slowly, o turbaned one.
Turbaned one, black of heart,
Dissolving slowly, o turbaned one.

Like logs of black sandalwood,
We lie here, smoldering slowly, o turbaned one.
Turbaned one, black of heart,
Smoldering slowly, o turbaned one.

[Translated from 'Cheere Vaaliya' by Suman Kashyap]

Like a house with walls of unbaked brick,
We are crumbling slowly, o turbaned one.
Turbaned one, black of heart,
Crumbling slowly, o turbaned one.

Shiv Kumar Batalvi

Umara De Sarvar

From this life-pond, o my song
Fill your beak
With the water of my existence.
It will not stay until tomorrow -
The radiance of pain,
Or the swans of grief.
Fill your beak today.

Listen ,o my song,
Life-ponds are deceptive,
They dry up in a flash.
The water of existence
Turns ashen and sour
Though you wish it would not happen.
Do not blame me tomorrow
Do not be angry tomorrow,
Fill your beak today.

I am told that the swans of grief
Are greedy.
When a heart dies, they sing.
They gather tears in the season of separation,
Gather them and fly.
They fly away, such a flight do they take,
They never return home.
Fill your beak today.

O my song,
If you fill your beak,
I will wrap it in gold,
I will become your slave,
I will become your shadow.
I beg you,
Do not, like me
Die thirsting,
Fill your beak today.

From this life-pond, o my song
Fill your beak

With the water of my existence.
It will not stay until tomorrow -
The radiance of pain,
Or the swans of grief.
Fill your beak today.

Shiv Kumar Batalvi

Vidhva Rut

O mother,
Tell me mother!
What should I do
In this widowed season?
Tell me
What should I do
In this season of loss?

The trees are leafless in this season,
Without fragrance.
The sun of my happiness has no warmth,
In this season.
But even more bitter
Is my youth that is widowed,
Tell me,
What should I do
With this bitter youth?

My pain has let its hair grow out
In this season
It has worn the milky white clothes of sorrow,
Kept the fast, not sung a song.
Tell me
Where can I drown myself,
In this season?
What should I do
In this widowed season?

O mother!
To whom can I attach myself in this season?
Who can I touch with these contaminated limbs?
At whose righteous door can I plant this sapling?
O woe!
What flowers can I shower upon it?
Mother,
Tell me mother
O mother,
Tell me mother!
What should I do

In this widowed season?
Tell me
What should I do
In this season of loss?

Shiv Kumar Batalvi

Where Perfumed Rivers Flow

Where perfumed rivers flow,
Is the home of my beloved.
Where passing breezes halt,
Is the home of my beloved.

Where dawn arrives on bare toes,
Where night paints henna-beams on feet,
Where fragrance bathes in moonlight,
Is the home of my beloved.

Where rays of light roam nakedly,
In green forests of sandalwood.
Where the flame seeks the lamp,
Is the home of my beloved.

Where sunsets sleep on wide waters,
And the deer leap.
Where tears fall for no reason,
Is the home of my beloved.

Where the farmer sleeps hungry,
Even though the wheat is the color of my beloved,
Where the wealthy ones lie in hiding,
Is the home of my beloved.

Where perfumed rivers flow,
Is the home of my beloved.
Where passing breezes halt,
Is the home of my beloved.

Shiv Kumar Batalvi

Why Ask

Why ask about the condition of fakirs like us?
We are water, separated from its river,
Emerged from a tear,
Melancholy, distressed.

Of course I knew that a painting is just
A whimsy of colors-
But when I entered the emporium of love,
I paid a price.

Countless bodies did I find,
But not one mind did I meet.
This was written in my fate,
In the four lines of my palm.

My destiny was my rival.
I could never find a way to escape it.
I did not leave Jhang, I did not pierce my ears,
And a crowd of Heers crossed my path.

People listen to my songs,
But call me a heretic,
Because I named pain my kaaba,
And sorrow, my god.

On occasion, in gatherings of great people
I have spoken sharply.
Perhaps I was arrogant about my love,
Perhaps I felt I had a claim upon pain.

You call yourself a wise man,
I say I am a lover.
Let us leave it to the people to decide
To whom they will give the esteem of a pir.

Shiv Kumar Batalvi

Words

Yesterday, I was collecting words.

One was up there, sitting in the bo tree,
Another was in the banyan.
One was wandering in my street,
Another was lying in the earthen jar.
A green word lay in the fields,
A black one was eating flesh.
A blue word was flying
With a grain of the sun in its beak.
Every single thing in this world looks like a word to me.
The words of eyes,
The words of hands.
But I do not understand words I hear from a mouth.
I can only read words.
I can only read words.

Shiv Kumar Batalvi

You Left

You left,
And grief cast its pall over me.
My pain condensed into a dropp
And rose into my eye.

For a great distance
My sight kissed your footprints,
Until the trail
Was swallowed by the dust of the road.

Before you left,
There was the bloom of your youth,
I turned around after you left
And every flower had wilted.

Since that day
I stopped speaking, I could not see.
My tongue was silenced
My sight turned to stone.

The pain that you gifted
To love,
Was the pain finally
That consumed 'Shiv'.

Shiv Kumar Batalvi